

Dropout Prevention Grants 2008 Recipients Interim Evaluation Report

Prepared by

EDSTAR, Inc.

February 2010

Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	4
Dropout Prevention Leadership and Collaboration	4
Goals and Objectives	5
Program Descriptions	6
Staff	6
Services Provided	7
Budgets	9
Expenditures	9
Conclusions	10
Recommendations	11
<i>Description</i>	14
Dropout Prevention Leadership and Collaboration	15
Grantees	16
Goals and Objectives	17
Data Sources	22
Program Descriptions	24
Staff	24
Services Provided	24
Services Provided to Staff.....	24
Services Provided to Families	24
Services Provided to Students	25
Students Served	32
Pregnancy or Parenting Responsibilities	33
When Services Were Provided.....	34
Commercial components.....	34
Obstacles Overcome	35
Data use	36
Setting up Programs	36
Reporting	36
Coordination to Enhance Effectiveness of Existing Programs	37
Resource Support	38
Coordination to Enhance Effectiveness of Existing Programs	39
Budgets	40
Expenditures	40
<i>Conclusions</i>	42
Recommendations	43

<i>Appendix</i>	46
Organizations Funded in 2008	47

Dropout Prevention Grant

Executive Summary

In 2007, the General Assembly of North Carolina approved Session Law 2007-323, establishing the Committee on Dropout Prevention and allocating \$7 million, which funded 60 dropout prevention grants. In 2008, the legislation stipulated the continuance of the Committee, and allocated another \$15 million to 123 agencies, including 39 of the original 2007 grantees. These funds were used to extend 2007 grant programs or to begin new dropout prevention programs for the 2008-2009 school year.

Although Dropout Prevention programs cannot be directly linked, the percentage of students who dropped out of North Carolina's schools went from 5.24% in 2006-2007 to 4.97% in 2007-2008. More than half of North Carolina's Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) (57%) reported decreases, and every high school grade (9-12) was able to report a reduction in the number of dropouts. With the exception of multiracial students, all races and ethnic groups saw declines in the numbers and percentages of dropouts (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008). Preliminary results for the 4- and 5-year cohort graduation rates show slight improvements in both. The 4-year cohort graduation rate increased to 69.9 in 2008 from 69.5 in 2007, while the 5-year cohort graduation rate increased to 71.8 in 2008 from 70.3 in 2007 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010).

Dropout Prevention Leadership and Collaboration

The collaboration and successful implementation of funding for the dropout prevention grants involves the well coordinated efforts of the North Carolina General Assembly, members of the Committee on Dropout Prevention, members of the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). The General Assembly allocates funding and specifies the priorities to be addressed in awarding grant funds. The members of the Committee on Dropout Prevention are appointed and serve the General Assembly's interests in making sure dropout funds and the process of awarding grants have appropriate oversight and leadership, adhere to the legislation,

and receive a thorough evaluation to determine effectiveness. The Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation reviews the grant evaluation and decides whether expanding or replicating dropout prevention awards will improve graduation rates. Additionally, the Commission examines research on student success, school reform efforts, and the suitability of required courses for graduation. The Commission also determines strategies best suited to help students remain in school when they are at risk of dropping out.

The NCDPI is the fiscal agent of the dropout prevention funds. The NCDPI also provides tremendous leadership to funded programs and hosts the necessary technical training and centralized communication that are essential to documenting the work being done with dropout prevention funds. The partnership of these entities is both innovative and effective. It is a unique collaboration of governing elected officials, state-wide community members and advocates, and the state department providing leadership for educational and public school initiatives throughout North Carolina. Responsibilities among the respective partnering entities are clear, and there is positive and consistent communication among the entities about dropout prevention efforts.

In early 2009, EDSTAR was contracted to provide general support to the Committee for Dropout Prevention, as well as many specific resources and services for grantees. Some information provided in this report for 2008 programs will be general and not final, as these programs are still in progress and will not have outcomes until the end of this school year. Grantees, however, have provided preliminary and interim information regarding their program goals and objectives, students, activities, obstacles, and highlights.

Goals and objectives

The goal of the grant is to reduce the dropout rate and discover effective dropout prevention programs. Toward this end, grantees were asked to write objectives as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) Outcomes. Of

the 123 agencies, 118 provided SMART Outcomes, most of which were suitable. The agencies with no SMART Outcomes had goals related to providing prevention services.

EDSTAR provided technical support for all grantees to write up to three SMART Outcomes they hoped to achieve with their programs. This was done to ensure that their intended outcomes were measurable and clearly articulated. Grant recipients were instructed to write SMART Outcomes that described which group of students they were targeting, how they intended to change the students, how the changes would be measured, and in what timeframe.

In addition to SMART Outcomes, all grantees wrote Logic Models that helped describe the activities they were providing to targeted groups, consistent with their SMART Outcomes. These Logic Models will facilitate duplication of successful programs, and can serve as a resource for other North Carolina agencies.

Accountability and transparency have been greatly increased by organizing each grantee's information into a report form and posting it to EDSTAR's website. Because the interim reports are available to all grantees on EDSTAR's website, staff can collaborate and share information from each other's reports. When reports are finalized, the NCDPI will provide a link so that the reports will be available to the public.

Program Descriptions

Grantees were asked to describe their programs, which were to include "best practices." Programs included practices that research has shown to be effective toward addressing those factors found to be more common in dropouts than in those who graduate. Many grantees chose programs that research has shown can help students who are at risk academically and behaviorally, which may cause them to leave school early.

Staff

Research shows that using regular teachers from students' schools in curricular programs outside of school times is one of the most efficient strategies to improve academics (Fashola, 1998). Appropriately, most of the program staff were teachers.

Trained professionals made up the second largest component of staff. Other staff members included students, parents, program directors, and community members from churches and businesses.

Services Provided

Professional development for staff was usually provided to train staff to implement the dropout prevention program, although some professional development took place as a main component of the program itself.

Families were an integral part of most programs. They were included in programs to varying degrees designed to help them help their children succeed.

Although some programs included services for staff and family members, most of the services were provided directly to students. Grantees were given autonomy to provide services they believed would best suit their students. Many programs provided multiple services while some concentrated on academic support or career resources required to graduate.

Programs could be classified into three primary types: targeted to specific students or groups, school-wide, and larger than school-wide, although some grants supported both a targeted component and a larger component. The school-wide and larger categories are considered “non-targeted” services and, although beneficial, can be more difficult to gauge directly, as many students may reap benefits that are not measured.

Targeted services. Because of the SMART Outcomes, it is easy to discern which students are targeted, what is expected to change, and how it will be measured. Grantees are keeping standard records for individuals served by the SMART Outcomes and documenting their progress. Targeted services are components of programs designed for students with specific factors that may make them more apt than students without those factors to drop out. Academic skill help and the integration of non-cognitive skills (e.g., leadership, self-confidence, etc.) were offered by nearly two thirds of the grantees. Summer programs, recreational activities, and peer tutoring were also popular. Services took place during and after school, on weekends, and in the summer.

These activities addressed specific risk factors. Nearly half the agencies addressed SMART Outcomes dealing with general academics and attendance.

Non-targeted services. Grantees were asked to describe non-targeted services they provided, how many students participated, and how many students they believe may have been affected. Often, grantees had no way of gauging participation, and determining how many students were affected was conjecture. For example, Communities in Schools of Brunswick County estimated that 600 students partook in their Red Ribbon Week; Drug Resistance and Awareness event. They indicated that all students were affected – and they likely were, but this was an assumption and not based on post-attitude surveys or long-term follow-up studies – nor would one expect it to be.

Ninth grade academics and transition services were another example of non-targeted services provided. The transition from middle to high school is commonly fraught with anxiety, and students are more likely to be suspended or leave school altogether during this time (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Newman, Lohman, Newman, Myers, & Smith, 2000). Schools that address this time of upheaval do much to quell the anxiety of the students as they make the transition, but, like other non-targeted programs, measuring success directly can be difficult. Some schools had orientations for ninth graders to reduce the stress associated with this time period.

Some activities affected not only the students, but other community members as well. Many students participated in community service programs, usually assisting people who are less fortunate in thrift shops or food banks. Students benefited from these programs, as did the community at large.

Across all the grantees, approximately 19,000 students benefited from non-targeted services. The non-targeted services, such as those described here, are more likely to affect the four-year cohort graduation rate than are the targeted services. The four-year cohort graduation rate reflects the students who graduate “on time” with the cohort in which they entered 9th grade. These preventative services are designed to keep students on track to graduate on time. The targeted services are for students who are

already off track and likely to drop out. If they get back on track and finish, they may not graduate “on time,” yet they may graduate instead of dropping out. We would expect success with targeted students to improve dropout rates, even if they do not improve four-year cohort graduation rates.

Budgets

Last year, new budget forms were designed and procedures set in place to improve budget reporting. Standardization and technical support for budgets significantly increased the accountability for the funds, and provide better information. For the 123 grants recipients submitting evaluation reports, the NCDPI indicates that a total of \$15,360,000 in grant funding was distributed.

Expenditures

All grantees are now using standard budget reporting forms. Figure 1 shows the categories in which expenditures are classified. Individual budgets, showing more detail within the categories, are collected by EDSTAR and forwarded to the Committee on Dropout Prevention to aide them with budget revision requests. Of the 123 grantees, 107 reported their expenditures as requested. What they budgeted and what they have spent are shown in Figure 1. The NC Department of Public Instruction is working with the grantees that have not submitted their budget reports to help them complete and submit them.

Figure 1: Total Expenditures for 123 Grant Recipients by Budgetary Categories

Category	Budgeted*	Spent
Personnel & Contracted Services	\$8,094,412.17	\$4,731,822.59
Supplies & Materials	\$920,236.46	\$492,565.55
Non-Fixed Operating Expenses	\$1,311,788.07	\$608,165.86

Category	Budgeted*	Spent
Fixed Operating Expenses	\$543,531.80	\$346,960.74
Property & Equipment Outlay	\$734,219.06	\$410,645.96
Services/Contracts	\$712,405.54	\$405,761.27
Other Expenses	\$618,792.33	\$259,755.10
Total Expenditures	\$12,935,385.43	\$7,255,677.07

*Budget information will be updated with the final report.

Ten of the 2008 grant recipients reported that they have spent all of their budgeted funds. Of the 107 grantees reporting, about 44% of the funds were not yet spent at the time the agencies reported to EDSTAR for this report.

The 2008 Grantees reported that an additional \$2,380,643 is supporting these dropout prevention programs from local funds and other sources.

Conclusions

The 2008 Dropout Prevention grants are serving approximately 29,000 students in 76 counties. Slightly less than 10,000 of the students served have documented risk factors that the services are designed to diminish or eliminate. An additional 19,000 students are being served by preventative programs designed to keep students from developing risk factors.

The framework now exists for documenting fidelity of program implementation, whether targeted students successfully meet program benchmarks, and how many students benefit from preventative components of these programs. If goals are met, success can be linked to well-targeted services and effective practices can be documented. Nearly all of the SMART Outcomes make sense with what we currently

know about who drops out in North Carolina. Further study would need to be done to obtain more information about what risk factors best predict who will drop out in different LEAs in North Carolina.

The move toward using appropriate data to target students may in and of itself contribute to reducing the dropout rate. As the practice of using academic data to target students for academic interventions becomes more routine, and access to the most challenging courses opens up to students who are predicted to succeed, students who have been traditionally referred to as “at-risk” may begin connecting with school and developing an increased sense of self-worth, as the academic opportunities that we give students are the greatest indicators of what we think they are worth.

Recommendations

Recommendations are based on obstacles reported by grantees, and improvements that would help move the process toward validation. Regarding data, we recommend:

- We would recommend using SAS® EVAAS® to obtain data regarding students who are predicted to need help to be academically successful. A *Custom Student Report* in EVAAS can be generated in minutes, providing names of students who are not likely to succeed in a required subject. Using EVAAS also helps provide information about the value of the interventions. Outcome data can be compared with the probability that students served were likely to succeed.
- SAS’s *Early Warning System*, which includes behavior data such as attendance and suspensions, will soon be available for LEAs to identify students who are not likely to succeed in school and will facilitate using data in time-efficient ways. Supporting grantees to use EVAAS and *Early Warning System* is beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, expanding services to include this would make it possible to create a database of students served that could be tracked longitudinally and would standardize how success is quantified.

- Some non-LEAs reported having difficulty obtaining data from LEAs. Instead of obtaining data, they may want to ask schools to use their data to refer students they are targeting with their programs.

The dropout prevention grants have moved from the development stage to a stage where much more can be learned regarding dropout prevention.

- A study analyzing North Carolina longitudinal achievement, behavior, and other student data by LEAs would make it possible to determine what characteristics identify students most likely to drop out of school. Concrete risk factors could be identified as more common among the population who dropped out, compared with the population who did not drop out in each individual North Carolina school district.
- EDSTAR's previous studies within individual districts has found that students with the following risk factors were 10 to 33 times more likely than other students with none of these factors to drop out of school compared to students with none of these risk factors: Being below grade level on 8th grade math EOG, Failing math courses that precede Algebra 1 in high school; Being retained in any grade; Having excessive absences; Having out-of-school suspensions; Scoring below grade level on reading EOG three or more times during grades 3-8; and, Changing schools during 9th grade. However, it is not known what specific combination of these factors most attributes to dropping out or whether these risk factors vary by LEA. This information can be known and would potentially impact the effectiveness of dropout prevention funds.
- A study identifying schools whose students that have this identified risk factors have low dropout rates would help us identify effective practices.
- Such information would allow district personnel to apply for funding for specific dropout factors common within their district. Grantors could use

the information to provide clearer guidelines about what applications they would fund based on research-based risk factors found to most contribute to dropping out in any given district. This grant application process would be simpler, yet more effective, and might increase the level of innovation among the existing and partnering leadership that support the grant award process.

Interim Evaluation

2008 Dropout Prevention Grant

Description

In 2007, the General Assembly of North Carolina approved Session Law 2007-323, establishing the Committee on Dropout Prevention and allocating \$7 million to fund 60 dropout prevention grants. In 2008, the legislation elected to allow the continuance of the Committee, and allocated another \$15 million to 123 agencies, including 39 of the original 2007 grantees. These funds were used to extend 2007 grant programs or to begin new dropout prevention programs for the 2008-2009 school year.

Although North Carolina's dropout rate rose each year from 2004 through 2007, the rate fell from 5.24% in 2006-2007 to 4.97% in 2007-2008. More than half of North Carolina's Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) (57%) reported decreases, and every high school grade (9-12) was able to report a reduction in the number of dropouts. With the exception of multiracial students, all races and ethnic groups saw declines in the numbers and percentages of dropouts (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008). Preliminary results for the four- and five-year cohort graduation rates show slight improvement in both. The four-year cohort graduation rate increased to 69.9 in 2008 from 69.5 in 2007, while the five-year cohort graduation rate increased to 71.8 in 2008 from 70.3 in 2007 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010).

The improvement in the dropout count coincides in part with implementation of the dropout prevention grant projects. Although it is not possible to attribute causal relationship between the funding of these initial dropout prevention grants and the reduction in dropout numbers, nevertheless, the S. L. 2007-323, the subsequent S.L. 2008-0107, the Committee on Dropout Prevention, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction have increased awareness and understanding of dropout prevention in North Carolina.

Dropout Prevention Leadership and Collaboration

The collaboration and successful implementation of funding for the dropout prevention grants involves the well coordinated efforts of the North Carolina General Assembly, members of the Committee on Dropout Prevention, members of the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). The General Assembly allocates funding and specifies the priorities to be addressed in awarding grant funds. The members of the Committee on Dropout Prevention are appointed and serve the General Assembly's interests in making sure dropout funds and the process of awarding grants have appropriate oversight and leadership, adhere to the legislation, and receive a thorough evaluation to determine effectiveness. The Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation reviews the grant evaluation and decides whether expanding or replicating dropout prevention funds will improve graduation rates. Additionally, the Commission examines research on student success, school reform efforts, and the suitability of required courses for graduation. The Commission also determines strategies best suited to help students remain in school when they are at risk of dropping out.

The NCDPI is the fiscal agent of the dropout prevention funds. The NCDPI also provides tremendous leadership to funded programs and hosts the necessary technical training and centralized communication that are essential to documenting the work being done with dropout prevention funds. The partnership of these entities is both innovative and effective. It is a unique collaboration of governing elected officials, state-wide community members and advocates, and the state department providing leadership for educational and public school initiatives throughout North Carolina. Responsibilities among the respective partnering entities are clear, and positive and consistent communication about dropout prevention efforts are addressed with grant funds.

Grantees for General Assembly of North Carolina's dropout prevention grant included LEAs, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), including non-profit and faith-based agencies; and universities or government agencies. Some grantees used their funding to enhance existing programs; others began new programs. Many grant-funded projects were part of a larger initiative paid for with a variety of resources. School systems, community volunteers, and other agencies provided resources to support programs. These resources ranged from full-time teachers and social workers to one-time guest speakers.

In early 2009, EDSTAR was contracted to provide general support to the Committee for Dropout Prevention, as well as many specific resources and services for grantees. Some information provided in this report for 2008 programs will be general and not final, as these programs are still in progress and will not have outcomes until the end of this school year. Grantees, however, have provided preliminary and interim information regarding their program goals and objectives, students, activities, obstacles, and highlights.

Grantees

Of the 123 agencies awarded the 2008 grants, 42 are LEAs, 17 are schools (including 3 colleges), 47 are non-profits, 4 are faith-based, and the other 13 include government agencies such as social services and a local police department, as well as YMCAs and other institutions. Most grantees worked in collaboration with other agencies to provide a wider variety of services than grantees could provide alone. They solicited familiar institutions as partners such as Scouting, 4H, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, YMCAs and YWCAs, as well as local churches and other organizations. Additionally, local agencies such as police departments were solicited for single lectures, and grantees that included career information often enlisted the services of local businesses for lectures, job shadowing, and internships.

Goals and objectives

The goal of the grant is to reduce the dropout rate and discover effective dropout prevention programs. Toward this end, grantees were asked to write objectives as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) Outcomes. EDSTAR provided technical support for all grantees to write up to three SMART Outcomes they hoped to achieve with their programs. This was done to ensure that their intended outcomes were measurable and clearly articulated. Grant recipients were instructed to write SMART Outcomes that described which group of students they were targeting, how they intended to change the students, how the changes would be measured, and in what timeframe.

Some grantees required considerable support to write a SMART Outcome related to their program. Some wrote SMART Outcomes indicating students would be targeted for improvement, only to learn later that the students they were providing services for did not need those services. One grantee, for example, wrote a SMART Outcome to help students pass algebra, then discovered some of the participants had already passed algebra. They had assumed they had not passed because they belong to subgroups thought to have trouble learning math. Some provided SMART Outcomes that described the activities or services they planned to provide rather than how they expected the students to change. For example, they may have written as an objective that a certain number of students would attend an after-school tutoring program. Although this is a commendable activity, the outcome hoped for is not that the students will attend, but that those who were doing poorly in math will improve in some measurable way. The after-school tutoring is the means to the objective, but not the objective itself.

Another problem that was prevalent at first was targeting students by demographic characteristics, such as race or socioeconomic status, for an improvement students did not necessarily need, such as academic improvement or a reduction in unexcused absences. Despite these minor setbacks, 118 of the 123 grantees provided

SMART Outcomes, nearly all of which were suitable. The other grantees are providing only prevention services or services not targeted to any individuals. Many found that the SMART Outcomes helped them understand what they wanted to achieve and to determine which services to provide to whom. Having clearly articulated SMART Outcomes helped them better communicate about whom their programs were designed to serve. For example, some had previously described programs as being for low-income students who lacked family support although services were designed for students who were failing core courses. After writing SMART Outcomes, they described their programs as being for students who were failing core courses. This helps them recruit more students who are likely to benefit from their programs.

In addition to providing SMART Outcomes, grantees were required to inform evaluators what data they would use to determine success, and how they would acquire it. We felt this information was germane because we have discovered, in evaluating other programs throughout the years, sometimes staff use data that are inappropriate or irrelevant to target students or to determine success. For example, a program may target students who are believed to be below grade level in reading. When we asked staff what data they would use to determine this, answers have ranged from students' race to which bus they ride home. Even programs that target students for legitimate factors that can be changed often target students inappropriately. Targeted students should be targeted for factors that can be changed, such as substandard academic achievement or excessive absences. What we have learned, however, is that even when the factors used to target the students are appropriate, how the students are selected may not be. For example, a valid SMART Outcome may read:

By August 2010, 85% of students who scored below grade level on their math EOG in 2009 will score at or above grade level.

Although this is a good outcome and it meets all SMART criteria, we may learn that the students targeted for the services are Black males, and staff have no knowledge

of their prior math achievement levels. EDSTAR has found that many educators do not know how to identify students for achievement goals by using achievement data. They continue the traditional practice of using demographic data as if these data were a proxy for achievement and behavior data. This is often discovered during the evaluation stage. Because we know this is extremely common, we are trying to help grantees avoid making this mistake by having them confirm in advance what data they will use to target students for their SMART Outcomes.

Education, in a transition stage, moving toward greater use of achievement and behavior data. Fewer programs are being designed to serve students based on demographic characteristics with accountability consisting of documenting how many students were served who met demographic criteria, such as low income or minority. The field of education is beginning to move toward designing programs with measureable academic or behavioral outcomes, such as helping failing students become academically successful. Accountability is changing to document whether students served ultimately meet the benchmarks.

We have worked to eliminate these incongruities through mandatory staff development, support, and data-management resources. If a SMART Outcome is written to reduce the number of students who scored below grade level in a particular subject, acceptable data to determine who those students are would be a list of students who scored below grade level in that subject. Although this seems readily apparent, through no fault of their own, many educators have difficulty embracing this concept. For decades, popular educational culture has insisted that certain subgroups are “at risk,” and therefore any member of that group is a suitable candidate for services designed to help these students. Although members of certain subgroups may be more likely than other groups to drop out, no research suggests that members of any subgroup are *more likely than not* to drop out. Research does indicate, however, that providing inappropriate services to students may actually make them more prone to exhibit declining academic performance and other factors that are more prevalent in

students who drop out than in those who don't. This is why ensuring services are being provided to appropriate students is so important.

In addition to SMART Outcomes, all grantees wrote Logic Models that helped describe the activities they were providing to targeted groups, consistent with their SMART Outcomes. These Logic Models will facilitate duplication of successful programs, and can serve as a resource for other North Carolina agencies.

Accountability and transparency have been greatly increased by organizing each grantee's information into a report form and posting it to EDSTAR's website. These reports briefly describe each program, list SMART Outcomes, describe what data were used and how they were obtained (including obstacles encountered), and any highlights of the programs. For example, Hoke County Schools' INSTEP program is briefly described:

From January 2008-May 2010, 65 students who are overage, not on grade level, and who lack the credits to graduate on time will be served in the grant funded INSTEP program. This program is designed to use a framework that includes academic rigor, integration of curriculum, problem-solving, personal/career development and family involvement. A Summer Academy will allow students to participate in alternative academic support classes. For example, NC Virtual Public School, independent study, Odyessyware (credit recovery), small group instruction and placed-based learning modules. In May, a Family Dinner & Awards Night will celebrate academic progress with a special guest motivational speaker.

In the individual reports available on EDSTAR's website, the description is followed by a list of activities they have incorporated into their program. Then, each of their SMART Outcomes is listed, with a short narrative telling what data they are using, how they obtained it, what obstacles (if any) they encountered obtaining the data, and services they are providing to achieve this outcome. The following is Hoke County Schools' first SMART Outcome:

By May 2010, all students in Cohort I and Cohort II who failed Algebra I (22) will pass Algebra I.

The interim report then indicates that they will use EOC scores, report cards, and benchmark scores as pre-data and post-data for this SMART Outcome. The final exam grade will also be used for post-data. They obtain these data from the District Testing office, the school principal, student transcripts, student progress reports, and NC WISE. Program staff indicated that obtaining these data was not difficult. Staff reported that to help participants meet this goal of passing Algebra I, they are providing math tutoring, before, during, and after school. Homework assistance is also provided. The school administrator assigned one of the assistant principals to work directly with the INSTEP program. The coordinator works with the student support services staff to meet and identify the needs of the students and their families. The coordinator also meets with teachers to discuss academic and behavior concerns regarding the students. The Hoke County Literacy Council provides three days of tutoring for students during the week.

Most of the grantees included highlights with their interim reports. These are some component or effect of their program they were particularly proud of. Highlights include individual student milestones, such as Dianna, a sixth grade student in the dropout program of Communities in Schools of Brunswick County. Dianna had been before Peer Court and was assigned to community service. She actually enjoyed working in a thrift shop, and came back to school with a renewed attitude toward her schoolwork and the other students. Her grades improved, and all of her teachers reported vast improvements in her attitude.

Other highlights affected larger groups of people in positive ways, such as Kannapolis City Schools, who had a dinner for students and their families, in which 128 people attended. Staff members discussed senior projects, curricula, college applications and financial aid. Students performed, and several parents spoke as well. The evening was such a success, parents requested it become an annual event.

Because the interim reports are available to all grantees on EDSTAR's website, staff can collaborate and share information from each other's reports. When reports are finalized, the NCDPI will provide a link so that the reports can be read by the public.

Data Sources

As previously discussed, program grantees were asked what data they used, how they acquired it, and if they encountered any obstacles.

Grantees acquired data from a variety of sources. Most data sources were appropriate for students targeted and for outcomes staff hoped to achieve. NC WISE and SAS EVAAS were common sources of data to determine students to target for academic and disciplinary factors. For SMART Outcomes which sought to make subjective changes – such as student attitudes or self-esteem – most grantees used pre-surveys and intend to follow up with post surveys at the conclusion of their programs or at the post-dates given in their SMART Outcome timeframes.

Few of the LEAs reported encountering obstacles to obtaining data. Those who did encounter obstacles often reported that the difficulties stemmed from a transition from one data system to another taking place, such as SIMS to NC WISE. NC WISE was new to some grantess, and they explained that they were just learning to use it properly. Some LEAs who relied on teachers to provide data also indicated that information was slow in coming.

Some non-profits and other agencies reported difficulties in obtaining data. Most of these agencies served students who attended local schools, and the data had to be retrieved from the school. Because their agency is not part of the school, parent permission often had to be obtained. In addition to parent permission, many of these agencies had to count on school staff to retrieve the data, and sometimes to interpret it. For example, Together Transforming Lives indicated that school staff provided important insight on how to read the standard test summaries, grade ranges of each

scoring level of the EOG/EOC, and whether or not students were retested. A judge explained to them how students were classified as juvenile delinquents.

Organizations that were not the LEAs which the students attended dealt with parent permission and going through schools to obtain the data. Most grantees expounded on how cooperative personnel who provided data were. A few, however, indicated that finding personnel in the schools willing to provide the data was difficult. Time was usually the crippling factor. School personnel's schedules were too busy to accommodate them, and finding a time to obtain and relay the data was taxing to the schools.

Some schools would not provide the data to the agencies, but would provide it to the parents of the students being served. This was particularly cumbersome to the grantees, who had to instruct parents on retrieving data. These scenarios entailed parents and school personnel who were both willing to cooperate, and able to find a common time. One agency explained that obtaining permission from parents was especially difficult, because some the parents were illiterate and could not fill out forms to provide permission for them to obtain their children's data.

One grant recipient, the Children's Council Smart Start, which serves teen parents and pregnant teens, sought students who had already left school because of pregnancies and parenthood to entice them to return to school and complete their education. The school system they served had no coordinated system to learn why students dropped out, so they were not able to easily make referrals to the program. Program staff were able to find and recruit many of the girls without the school system being able to refer them, although it was much more difficult. They now have a viable dropout prevention program which appears to be successful. The school system is now instigating an exit interview that will make future endeavors much simpler.

Overall, most grantees reported no problems obtaining or interpreting data. Only 20 of the 123 agencies reported any problems, and most of these were overcome.

The transition to NC WISE was the most commonly reported obstacle, not only because of the learning curve involved, but because some data were not previously recorded in the old system. For example, at some schools, tardy students may have been reported as absent. Non-LEAs reported that having to go through schools or through parents for achievement or other data sources was difficult, but in no case was the problem insurmountable.

Program Descriptions

Grantees were asked to describe their programs, which were to include “best practices.” Programs included practices that research has shown to be effective toward addressing those factors found to be more common in dropouts than in those who graduate. Many grantees chose programs which research has shown can help students who are at risk academically and behaviorally which may cause them to leave school early.

Staff

Research shows that using regular teachers from students’ schools in curricular programs outside of school times is one of the most efficient strategies to improve academics (Fashola, 1998). Appropriately, most of the program staff in the dropout programs were teachers. Trained professionals made up the second largest component of staff. Other staff members included students, parents, program directors, and community members from churches and businesses.

Services Provided

Services Provided to Staff. Many of the agencies provided professional staff development. Most professional development was provided to supplement or train staff for the programs implemented for the students, although some took place as a main component of the program itself.

Services Provided to Families. Although all services were provided to help the students, many services were provided to families. In fact, nearly every participating

grant recipient included parents in their program to some degree. Across programs, parents were involved at every turn, from planning programs to actually providing services to the students. Grantees made concerted efforts to communicate with families through progress reports, frequent telephone calls home, e-mail, etc. Orientations were common at the onset of dropout prevention programs, and parents were often encouraged or required to attend.

Although all services were designed ultimately to benefit the students, some services were provided directly to parents to help them help their children succeed. For example, Hoke County Schools' program staff invited the North Carolina Justice Center for Education & Law Project to address 40 parents on their children's right to a sound, basic education. They also held a workshop for students and their parents, in which they distributed their own handbook on policies for students and parents. Cleveland County Schools' program involved reducing truancy, and parents of truant students were required to attend truancy mediation and truancy court with their children.

Many programs offered workshops for parents to teach them parenting skills conducive to their children's success, or how to help their children choose and apply to colleges. Some grantees offered transportation, childcare, and incentives such as dinner or door prizes at their events. Some encouraged parents to attend field trips and orientations with their children. Others made some parent activities mandatory. Some parents participated in fund-raising events. Other events involving parents included celebrations, or family nights, in which students performed or were recognized for success and parents were invited to join in the celebrations.

Services Provided to Students. Grantees were given autonomy to provide services they believed would best suit their students. Many programs provided multiple services while some concentrated on academic support or career resources required to graduate.

Programs could be classified into three primary types: targeted to specific students or groups, school-wide, and larger than school-wide, although some grants

supported both a targeted component and a larger component. The school-wide and larger categories are considered “non-targeted” services and, although beneficial, can be more difficult to gauge directly, as many students may reap benefits that are not measured.

As previously discussed, interim summary reports are available at EDSTAR’s website. These reports provide brief descriptions of all grantees’ activities, data resources, and SMART Outcomes. When the evaluation of these grants is finalized, these reports will be updated and shared to provide information regarding effective practices. The NCDPI will provide a link to the reports through their website, allowing access to the general public. Such transparency imposes a certain degree of accountability while allowing others to benefit from the successes of the grantees’ dropout programs.

Targeted services. Because of the SMART Outcomes, it is easy to discern which students are targeted, what is expected to change, and how it will be measured. Targeted services are components of programs designed for students with specific factors that may make them more apt than students without those factors to drop out. The factor should be something that can change, such as a grade level on an EOG test or numbers of unexcused absences. Race and socioeconomic status do not change, and should therefore not be used as reasons to target students for change. When students are identified as “at risk” because of a factor other than the one addressed in the SMART Outcome, valuable time and resources are wasted and students can actually regress. As grantees who erroneously identified students as “at risk” testified:

“A second issue encountered was that some students that we identified as ‘at-risk’ did not need to show improvement in their attendance, so our data could have actually been stronger if we had narrowed our targets.”

Another example is:

“. . . [S]ome students who had been retained were not in need of any interventions because the students had already participated in credit recovery or were set to graduate in Spring 2009.”

Activities addressed specific risk factors. Nearly half the agencies addressed SMART Outcomes dealing with general academics and attendance. Actual services provided to students varied, although some were more common than others. Academic skill help and the integration of non-cognitive skills (e.g., leadership, self-confidence, etc.) were the two most common services provided, with 63% of the grantees offering these.

Academic skill help was usually in the form of tutoring, which may have been in small groups or one-on-one. Tutoring was performed by teachers from the schools, volunteers from other agencies such as universities or local businesses, or from other students. More than a quarter of the agencies (28%) allowed more senior students to serve as peer tutors, usually after passing through a short training session or academy.

Many activities were done to integrate non-cognitive skills. Mentors were used in more than a quarter of the programs. These adult advocates were carefully chosen for the guidance they could provide students. Other examples of integrating non-cognitive skills involved instruction in making good choices and being responsible for one's behavior. Anti-bullying, drug abuse, pregnancy prevention, and making sound choices were many of the topics addressed.

Some grantees helped students look to the future with graduation plans, college, vocational, and career opportunities. Local businesses provided interesting lectures on job possibilities, and some even provided internships for high school students. Parents were sometimes involved in career and vocational information seminars. Field trips to college campuses and businesses were common activities to promote these outcomes.

The following figure shows the activities provided and the percentages of grantees that provided each activity.

Figure 2: Services Provided

Services	Percentage of grantees offering (N = 123)
Academic Skill Help	63%
Integration of non-cognitive skills (e.g. leadership, self-confidence, etc.)	63%
Summer programs	53%
Other	44%
Recreational activities	42%
Peer Tutoring	37%
Customized Graduation Plans	35%
Counseling groups	35%
Transition to high school programs	33%
Primary Adult Advocate	28%
Peer-based mentoring	28%
School-wide reform (e.g., professional development)	26%
Credit Recovery	23%
Service learning	23%
Preparation for vocational or applied skills certificate programs	19%
On and off campus employment opportunities	16%

Note: Figures may add to more than 100% because agencies offer more than one service each.

Coordination of existing services from multiple agencies such as health, mental health, social work, parent education, and after-school programming was an important component of several research-based programs. These programs tended to target students with more severe needs such as truancy, chronic absenteeism, and court

involvement. The programs provided rapid intervention and wrap-around services, often on the school site, with the goal of keeping students in school.

Other types of services provided included summer camps (with academic instruction as well as outdoor sports and educational activities), summer classroom settings with academic instruction and orientation, service learning projects, pregnancy prevention, job placement and career days, field trips (to educational settings such as museums, to college and high school campuses, and to recreational settings), and lessons on attitudes and making good choices. Services took place during and after school, on weekends, and in the summer.

Figure 3 shows risk factors for which grant recipients provided specific services. These were calculated from the SMART Outcomes. The category “Other” includes other good SMART Outcomes that did not fit these categories. The category NOT SMART refers to outcomes that were not measureable or did not relate to how students would change. These were outcomes such as those discussed previously, which quantified how often a service would take place or some other output or activity related to, but not defined as, a SMART Outcome. Although EDSTAR provided technical support to help the grantees, some grantees did not take advantage of this and submitted outcomes that were not SMART, or had EDSTAR help them with some SMART Outcomes while keeping others that were not SMART. Agencies wrote up to three SMART Outcomes. Nearly half the agencies addressed SMART Outcomes dealing with general academics and attendance.

Figure 3: Percent of Grantees With These Categories of SMART Outcomes (Each grantee submitted up to three.)

Category	Percentage of grantees addressing (N = 123)
General Academic Support	47%
Attendance	44%
Math	33%
Reading	29%
Suspensions	28%
NOT SMART	18%
Connections/Personal Social	16%
Credit Recovery	9%
Other SMART Outcomes	6%

All grantees wrote Logic Models that helped describe the activities they were providing to targeted groups, consistent with their SMART Outcomes. These Logic Models will facilitate duplication of successful programs, and can serve as a resource for other North Carolina agencies.

Non-targeted services. All grantees were asked to describe any not-targeted services they provided, how many students participated, and how many students they believe may have been affected. Often, grantees had no way of gauging participation, and determining how many students were affected was conjecture. For example, Communities in Schools of Brunswick County estimated that 600 students partook in their Red Ribbon Week; Drug Resistance and Awareness event. They indicated that all students were affected – and they likely were, but this was an assumption and not

based on post-attitude surveys or long-term follow-up studies – nor would one expect it to be.

Kannapolis City Schools installed NovaNet on their computers, which allows students to recover credits needed toward graduation. Although credit recovery is part of their program for their targeted students, the service is available to any students who want to use it. Staff estimated that approximately 49 students had taken advantage of NovaNet. Nearly a quarter (23%) of grantees have reported using credit recovery programs for their targeted students, but most of these programs are available and used by other students as well.

Johnston County Schools instituted a “Caught Doing Good” reward program, which has since spread to include all students and created a positive atmosphere school-wide.

Ninth grade academies, orientations, and other transition services were another example of non-targeted services provided. The transition from middle to high school is commonly fraught with anxiety, and students are most likely to be suspended or leave school altogether during this time (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Newman, Lohman, Newman, Myers, & Smith, 2000). Schools that address this time of upheaval do much to quell the anxiety of the students as they make the transition, but, like other non-targeted programs, measuring success directly can be difficult.

Some activities affected not only the students, but other community members as well. Many students participated in community service programs, usually helping out people who are less fortunate in thrift shops or food banks. Students benefited from these programs, as did the community at large.

Across all the grantees, approximately 19,000 students benefited from non-targeted services. The non-targeted services, such as those described here, are more likely to affect the four-year cohort graduation rate than are the targeted services. The four-year cohort graduation rate reflects the students who graduate “on time” with the cohort in which they entered 9th grade. These preventative services are designed to keep students on track to graduate on time. The targeted services are often for students who

are already off track and likely to drop out. If they get back on track and finish, they may not graduate “on time,” yet they may graduate instead of dropping out. We would expect success with targeted students to improve dropout rates, even if they do not improve four-year cohort graduation rates.

Students Served

Of the 9,731 targeted students served, 52% were male and 48% were female.

Figure 4 shows the races of the targeted students served. The percentages of 2008-2009 students who dropped out are also indicated in the gender and race figures to provide comparisons. In the case of race, 2007-2008 dropout percentages are also provided for a comparison.

Figure 4: Race of Targeted Students Served

Race	Total students served in 2008 programs (N = 9731)	2007-2008 Dropouts
American Indian	5%	2%
Asian	1%	1%
Black	55%	36%
Hispanic	10%	10%
Multiracial	3%	2%
White	26%	48%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

Black students were served in higher proportions than the distribution of North Carolina dropouts who were Black. Conversely, fewer Whites were served. These numbers should closely mirror the percentages of dropouts. As the trend toward using achievement and behavior data replaces using demographic data, these comparisons should better align.

Figure 5: Percent of Students Served by Grade Level

Grade	Percentage of students (N =9731)
K	1%
1 st	1%
2 nd	1%
3 rd	2%
4 th	2%
5 th	10%
6 th	9%
7 th	12%
8 th	10%
9 th	28%
10 th	8%
11 th	6%
12 th	9%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

The majority of students served were in 8th or 9th grade. This makes sense, as the transition to high school is frequently problematic and is where data can clearly identify which students are less likely to graduate. As previously noted, some programs served pre-school children, or served parents or staff as the primary clients. This is consistent with research on the lasting benefits of early childhood education.

Pregnancy or Parenting Responsibilities

Eleven of the grantees are specifically including services for teen parents or pregnant teens. The majority of the programs (92%) had no students leave school due to

pregnancy or parenting responsibilities. A total of 28 students left due to pregnancy or parenting responsibilities across all grantees. Eleven specifically mentioned that they served pregnant or parenting teens, and that the students stayed in school as a result of the services provided.

When Services Were Provided

Grantees delivered general and targeted services during the school day, after school, and in the summer. Services took place during the school day for the majority of programs (76%). Most of the grantees (60%) also provided summer programs. Many of the grant recipients' summer programs were continuations of the programs that took place during the school year, although several recipients provided different services altogether. Summer programs were more likely to include field trips, with combinations of educational and entertaining places visited.

Commercial components

Many grant recipients incorporated commercial programs into their curricula — most of them on-line or other computer programs. *Study Island* is an online curriculum program that identifies the student level and builds a study curriculum based upon that level. *Orchard* identifies student levels in Math and Language Arts and challenges the student to increase working towards the next level cognition. *Accelerated Reader* is a program that targets the student reading grade level and supplies a range recommended for improvement. This program also tests students for reading ability and comprehension. *NovaNet*, *Odyessyware*, *NCVPS* and other programs were used to recover credits.

Several recipients used *AVID* (Advancement Via Individual Determination). This is a grade 4 through 12 system designed to prepare students for four-year college eligibility and success. Direct support is given to the students through the *AVID* elective class, curricula, tutorials, family workshops, summer bridge programs, field trips, academic recognition events, and student leadership training.

The *Plato Learning System* is an online, comprehensive curriculum software program that has content and curricula aligned with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for all English, mathematics, science, and social studies curricula.

The *Synergistic Learning System* is a modular system for students, which also incorporates learning stations in the classroom. Each module is an intensive, seven-session exploration of a particular topic. Modules are delivered at self-sufficient workstations that accommodate everything students need to complete their activities. The classroom becomes an applied learning center, a place where students use technology to explore and apply the concepts they learn throughout the day. Math, science, communication, and language arts skills are put to practice as students complete their module activities.

Commercially packaged programs included *Why Try*, *Read 180*, *STRIDES*, *Check & Connect*, and many others.

Obstacles Overcome

Grantees reported obstacles they encountered while implementing their programs. Most of the problems were those grantees encountered when trying to obtain data, as discussed in the “Data Sources” section.

Wilson County Department of Social Services was one of the grantees that used funds to serve pregnant and parenting teen girls. As they reported, “We found it very hard to get students to return phone calls and keep appointments with their case managers. When DPI approved for us to purchase our case managers cell phones with unlimited texting capability, we experienced an immediate and effective communication method. This has resulted in on-going communication between student and their case managers. It is also a good tool to use in providing motivational messages which have increased the participation and relationship with their case manager.”

Some grant recipients reported having difficulty finding enough volunteers. The grantees changed their requirements, which broadened the pool of potential tutors or mentors. By allowing encouragement and assistance to take place through emails and phone calls, in addition to in-person contact, more mentors were willing to participate.

Grant recipients who scheduled activities for parents reported better participation when they made it as easy as possible for parents to attend. Different time frames, such as before school or later in the evenings, were more convenient for some parents. Parents also seemed more likely to attend if their children were performing, or if food and door prizes were offered. Some grantees offered transportation and childcare services as well.

Data use

Setting up Programs

The grant recipients were asked to use data in a variety of ways. For programs that targeted students with specific risk factors, technical assistance helped staff understand the importance of using objective data to target individual students more likely than other students to drop out, i.e., students who had risk factors that can be changed. Logic Models also helped grant recipients understand their programs and see the “big picture” of what they hoped to achieve. Logic Models will also facilitate replicating programs that prove to be effective in eliminating or diminishing risk factors associated with dropping out. Although requiring SMART Outcomes and Logic Models, and introducing a standardized reporting system greatly increased the effectiveness of programs and accountability, more must be done to streamline and facilitate these areas.

Reporting

EDSTAR sought feedback from grantees regarding how to make the reporting process easier for those who are not technologically skilled. From interviews, reviewing tech-support questions, and small focus group discussions, we restructured the record-

keeping and reporting process to be more friendly to people with little or no technical skills. The interim and final reports from grantees to EDSTAR have been changed to Adobe Acrobat forms, which people reported being much more comfortable with than web-based data collection or spreadsheets. These forms allow them flexibility to complete them over time. Record-keeping tools were modified to better meet grantee needs. A face-to-face technical assistance meeting to walk grantees through the processes required for collecting and reporting data was very helpful. As one grantee commented, "We still are jumping through the data hoop, but at least now it is not on fire."

Keeping records and reporting information are critical to program accountability and documenting effectiveness. EDSTAR will continue to support grantees as they collect information for reporting about program implementation and outcomes. EDSTAR maintains a website with forms to help with record keeping, reporting forms required for program evaluation and grantee reports, and other resources to support grantees in program evaluation (<http://www.edstar.biz/client/dropoutprevention/>).

Coordination to Enhance Effectiveness of Existing Programs

Grantees reported a number of ways of coordinating services with other programs and a variety of synergistic effects. Some of the common ways that the grant-funded programs reported enhancing the effectiveness of existing programs are shown in Figure 5. Some agencies were able to enhance current after-school programs with more tutoring, parent training, transportation, and other activities. Many grant recipients were able to enhance their existing technology, with both equipment and staff to teach others its use. One school found a comprehensive curriculum software program that had been lying unused. They trained teachers and other staff on its use, which enhanced curriculum offerings for all students and allowed students to recover credits needed for graduation.

Figure 5: Coordination to Enhance Effectiveness of Existing Programs, Initiatives, or Community Services

Activity	Percentage of grantees (N = 123)
Started new programs or added services that supported old programs	46%
Multi-agency coordination	40%
Provided computer technology or online classes used beyond the scope of the program	37%
Professional development opportunities for staff of existing programs	31%
Trained volunteers	26%
Changed school culture	21%
Increased transportation for after-school activities	6%
Changed school policies	3%

Note: Percentages may add up to more than 100% due to programs reporting two or more of these.

Resource Support

Many grant-funded projects were part of a larger initiative supported by a variety of resources. School systems, community volunteers, and other agencies provided resources to support these programs. These resources ranged from full-time teachers and social workers to one-time guest speakers. Volunteers served in a variety of functions: as tutors, chaperones, drivers, activity organizers, fund-raisers, and even snack-preparers. Many grant recipients reported using community buildings to hold activities. Some received computers and other equipment from local agencies and businesses. Figure 6 shows the types of resources frequently reported and the percentage of programs reporting these.

Figure 6: Resources Used in Conjunction with Grant Funds

Resource	Percentage of programs (N = 123)
Facilities	77%
Equipment	67%
Paid staff from our agency	61%
Short-term volunteers (one-time speakers or guests)	44%
Paid staff from outside agencies	38%
Long-term volunteers (people who came in frequently to tutor or help out in any way)	37%
Funds	34%
Services	24%

Note: Percentages may add up to more than 100% due to programs reporting two or more of these.

Coordination to Enhance Effectiveness of Existing Programs

In answer to the question “Describe how the program or initiative was coordinated to enhance the effectiveness of existing programs, initiatives, or services in the community,” reports detailed a number of ways of coordinating and a variety of synergistic effects. Some of the common ways that the grant-funded programs reported enhancing the effectiveness of existing programs are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Coordination to Enhance Effectiveness of Existing Programs, Initiatives, or Community Services

Activity	Percentage of grantees (N = 123)
Started new programs or added services that supported old programs	46%
Multi-agency coordination	40%
Provided computer technology or online classes used beyond the scope of the program	37%
Professional development opportunities for staff of existing programs	31%
Trained volunteers	26%
Changed school culture	21%
Increased transportation for after-school activities	6%
Changed school policies	3%

Percentages may add up to more than 100% due to programs reporting two or more of these.

Budgets

Last year, new budget forms were designed and procedures set in place to improve budget reporting. Standardization and technical support for budgets significantly increased the accountability for the funds, and provide standardized information. For the 123 grants recipients submitting evaluation reports, the NCDPI indicates that a total of \$15,360,000 in grant funding was distributed.

Expenditures

All grantees are now using standard budget reporting forms. Figure 8 shows the categories in which expenditures are classified. Individual budgets, showing more detail within the categories, are collected by EDSTAR and forwarded to the Dropout Committee to aide them with budget revision requests. Of the 123 grantees, 107

reported their expenditures as requested. What they budgeted and what they have spent are shown in Figure 8. The NCDPI is working with the grantees that have not submitted their budget reports to help them complete and submit them.

Figure 8: Total Expenditures for 123 Grant Recipients by Budgetary Categories

Category	Budgeted*	Spent
Personnel & Contracted Services	\$8,094,412.17	\$4,731,822.59
Supplies & Materials	\$920,236.46	\$492,565.55
Non-Fixed Operating Expenses	\$1,311,788.07	\$608,165.86
Fixed Operating Expenses	\$543,531.80	\$346,960.74
Property & Equipment Outlay	\$734,219.06	\$410,645.96
Services/Contracts	\$712,405.54	\$405,761.27
Other Expenses	\$618,792.33	\$259,755.10
Total Expenditures	\$12,935,385.43	\$7,255,677.07

*Budget information will be updated with the final report.

Ten of the 2008 grant recipients reported that they have spent all of their budgeted funds. Of the 107 grantees reporting, about 44% of the funds were not yet spent at the time that agencies reported to EDSTAR for this report.

The 2008 Grantees reported that an additional \$2,380,643 is supporting these dropout prevention programs from local funds and other sources.

Conclusions

The 2008 Dropout Prevention grants are serving approximately 29,000 students in 76 counties. Slightly less than 10,000 of the students served have documented risk factors that the services are designed to diminish or eliminate. An additional 19,000 students are being served by preventative programs designed to keep students from developing risk factors. Together, these two kinds of services should decrease the dropout rate and increase the four-year cohort graduation rate.

The framework now exists for documenting fidelity of program implementation, whether targeted students successfully meet program benchmarks, and how many students benefit from preventative components of these programs. Most of the programs have SMART Outcomes for their targeted students. If they meet their program goals for these students, the programs can be linked to the well-targeted success and effective practices can be documented. What is not known is how their SMART Outcomes relate to dropout prevention. For example, a grantee may have a SMART Outcome regarding increasing attendance for students who have been absent more than 20 days. They may meet their goal with these students, showing their program is effective for increasing attendance in chronically absent students, but the students may still drop out. They may be dropping out for some other reason. Nearly all of the SMART Outcomes make sense with what we currently know about who drops out in North Carolina. Further study would need to be done to obtain more information about what risk factors best predict who will drop out in different LEAs in North Carolina.

The move toward using academic and behavior data to target students for intervention services may in and of itself contribute to reducing the dropout rate. We have also found that aligning services to needs using academic and behavior data can have immediate positive effects.

As the practice of using academic data to target students for academic interventions becomes more routine, and access to the most challenging courses opens up to students who are predicted to succeed, students who have been traditionally

referred to as “at-risk” may begin connecting with school and developing an increased sense of self-worth. The academic opportunities that we give students are the greatest indicators of what we think they are worth and what we convey to the child.

Recommendations

Most LEAs reported no problems obtaining data needed to ensure that their programs served students described in their SMART Outcomes. Some, however, reported that obtaining data was time consuming. We would recommend using SAS EVAAS to obtain data regarding students who are predicted to need help to be academically successful. A Custom Student Report in EVAAS can be generated in minutes, providing names of students who are not likely to succeed in a required subject. Using EVAAS also helps provide information about the value of the interventions. Outcome data can be compared with the probability that students served were likely to succeed if they receive no intervention. SAS’s Early Warning System, which includes behavior data such as attendance and suspensions, will soon be available for LEAs to identify students who are not likely to succeed in school and will facilitate using data in time-efficient ways. Supporting grantees to use EVAAS and EWS is beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, expanding services to include this would make it possible to create a database of students served that could be tracked longitudinally and would also standardize how success is quantified.

Some non-LEAs reported having difficulty obtaining data from LEAs. Instead of obtaining data, they may want to ask schools to use their data to refer students they are targeting with their programs.

The dropout prevention grants have moved from the development stage to a stage where much more can be learned regarding dropout prevention. A study analyzing North Carolina longitudinal achievement, behavior, and other student data by district would make it possible to determine what characteristics identify students most likely to drop out of school. Concrete risk factors could be identified as more common among the population who dropped out, compared with the population who did not drop out in each individual North Carolina school district. EDSTAR’s previous

studies within districts has found that students with the following risk factors were 10 to 33 times more likely than other students with none of these factors to drop out of school: Being below grade level on 8th grade math EOG, Failing math courses that precede Algebra 1 in high school; Being retained in any grade; Having excessive absences; Having out-of-school suspensions; Scoring below grade level on reading EOG three or more times during grades 3-8; and, Changing schools during 9th grade. However, it is not known what specific combination of these factors most attributes to dropping out or whether these risk factors vary by LEA. This information can be known and would potentially impact the effectiveness of dropout prevention funds. Such information would allow district personnel to apply for funding for specific dropout factors common within their district. Grantors could use the information to provide clearer guidelines about what applications they would fund based on research-based risk factors found to most contribute to dropping out in any given district. This grant application process would be simpler, yet more effective, and might increase the level of innovation among the existing and partnering leadership that support the grant award process.

References

- Fashola, O. S. (1998). Review of extended-day and after-school programs and their effectiveness. Report no. 24. Retrieved February 6, 2008, from <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techreports/report24.pdf>
- Hertzog, C. J., & Morgan, P. L. (1998). Breaking the barriers between middle school and high school: Developing a transition team for student success. *NASSP Bulletin*, 82(597), 94-98.
- Newman, B. M., Lohman, B. J., Newman, P. R., Myers, M. C., & Smith, V. L. (2000). Experiences of urban youth navigating the transition to ninth grade. *Youth & Society*, 31(4), 387-416
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2008). Dropout Report 2007-2008. Retrieved February 11, 2009, from <http://dpi.state.nc.us/docs/research/dropout/reports/2008/0708report.pdf>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2010). 2008 Cohort graduation rate released. Retrieved February 14, 2010, from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/newsroom/news/2008-09/20080807-03>

Appendix

Organizations Funded in 2008

County	Organization	Type
Alamance	Alamance Burlington School System	LEA
Anson	Anson County Schools	LEA
Anson	Direct Action Media Academy - Morven	NGO
Anson	North Carolina PTA	NGO
Ashe	Ashe County Middle School	LEA
Beaufort	Beaufort County Schools	LEA
Beaufort	Purpose of God Annex Outreach Center	NGO
Beaufort	Wright Flight, Inc. - Beaufort County	NGO
Bertie	One Economy Corporation - The Hive	NGO
Bladen	Bladen County Educational Foundation	NGO
Brunswick	Brunswick Arts Council and Brunswick County School System	NGO
Brunswick	Communities In Schools of Brunswick County, Inc.	NGO
Buncombe	Buncombe County Schools	LEA
Buncombe	WRESA	NGO
Buncombe	YWCA of Asheville and Western North Carolina	NGO
Burke	Burke County Public Schools	LEA
Cabarrus	Boys & Girls Club of Cabarrus County	NGO
Cabarrus	Cabarrus County Opportunity School at the Glenn Center	LEA
Cabarrus	Kannapolis City Schools	LEA
Caldwell	Communities In Schools of Caldwell County,	NGO

County	Organization	Type
	Inc.	
Carteret	Carteret County Public Schools	LEA
Catawba	Hickory Public Schools	LEA
Chatham	Chatham County Schools	LEA
Chatham	Chatham County Together!	NGO
Cherokee	Cherokee County Department of Social Services	NGO
Chowan	Edenton-Chowan Schools	LEA
Cleveland	Cleveland County Schools	LEA
Columbus	New Hope Missionary Baptist/ Pathways to the Future	NGO
Columbus	Whiteville City Schools (Whiteville High School)	LEA
Craven	Havelock High School	LEA
Cumberland	Cumberland County Schools	LEA
Cumberland	Cumberland County Schools Indian Education	LEA
Cumberland	Helping Young People Excel - HYPE Collaborative	NGO
Davidson	Thomasville City Schools	LEA
Davidson	Communities In Schools of Lexington/Davidson	NGO
Duplin	Charity Middle School / Duplin County	LEA
Duplin	Duplin County Schools	LEA
Durham	Bridges Pointe Foundation	NGO
Durham	Durham Public Schools	LEA
Edgecombe	OIC, Inc	NGO

County	Organization	Type
Edgecombe	St. Luke Total Community Outreach Ministries	NGO
Forsyth	Carter G. Woodson Public Charter School	LEA
Forsyth	YWCA of Winston-Salem	NGO
Gaston	Alliance for Children and Youth	NGO
Graham	Graham County Schools	LEA
Granville	Granville Co Schools	LEA
Greene	Greene County Schools	LEA
Guilford	Communities In Schools of High Point	NGO
Guilford	N. C. A & T State University	Universities or gov't
Guilford,Forsyth,Rockingham	Operation Homework Inc.	NGO
Halifax	Hobgood Citizen Group, Inc.	NGO
Halifax	Ivory Community Development Corporation	NGO
Halifax	Together Transforming Lives, inc	NGO
Harnett	Betsy Johnson Regional Hospital Teens As Parents	NGO
Harnett	Harnett County Schools	LEA
Harnett	Think Smart Outreach Center, Inc	NGO
Henderson	Children and Family Resource Center	NGO
Henderson	West Henderson High	LEA
Hertford	Hertford County Public Schools - Winton	LEA
Hoke	Hoke County Schools	LEA
Hyde	Hyde County Schools	LEA
Iredell	Iredell-Statesville Schools	LEA

County	Organization	Type
Jackson	Western Carolina University	NGO
Johnston	Johnston County Schools	LEA
Johnston	Another Step Forward (formally known as Adopt a School)	NGO
Johnston	Johnston County Department of Social Services	NGO
Jones	Jones County Schools - Senior High School	LEA
Lincoln	Lincoln Charter School	LEA
Martin	Martin County Schools	LEA
McDowell	McDowell County Schools	LEA
Mecklenburg	Cross-Country for Youth	NGO
Mecklenburg	KIPP Charlotte	School
Mecklenburg	The Urban Restoration and First Baptist Church-West Community Services Assoc	NGO
Montgomery	Communities In Schools of Montgomery County	NGO
Moore	Northern Moore Family Resource Center	NGO
Nash	Caught Before Fallen Dropout Prevention Initiative	NGO
Nash	Rocky Mount Family YMCA, Inc	NGO
Nash	World Tabernacle Church - The Impact Center	NGO
New Hanover	DREAMS Center for Arts Education	NGO
New Hanover	John T. Hoggard High School	School
Northampton	Northampton County Schools	LEA
Orange	Communities In Schools of Orange County	NGO
Pamlico	HeartWorks Children Medical Home Mission	NGO

County	Organization	Type
Pasquotank	The Education Foundation for Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Public Schools	NGO
Perquimans	Perquimans County Schools	LEA
Pitt	Greenville Police Department - North Carolina	NGO
Pitt	Pitt County Schools	LEA
Pitt	Ray of Hope, Inc	NGO
Randolph	Randolph County Schools	LEA
Randolph	Communities In Schools of Randolph County	NGO
Robeson	Boys and Girls Club of Lumberton/Robeson County	NGO
Robeson	Communities in Schools of Robeson County - Lambdin	NGO
Robeson	Sacred Pathways	NGO
Rockingham	Rockingham County Schools	LEA
Rockingham	Rockingham County Youth Services	NGO
Rowan	Communities In Schools of Rowan County	NGO
Rowan	West Rowan High School	School
Rutherford	Communities In Schools of Rutherford County, Inc.	NGO
Rutherford	Rutherford County Schools	LEA
Sampson	Clinton City Schools	LEA
Sampson	Sampson County Schools	LEA
Scotland	Scotland County Schools	LEA
Stanly	Albemarle High School	School
Stokes	South Stokes High School	School

County	Organization	Type
Swain	Swain County Schools	LEA
Union	Environmental Expeditions	NGO
Vance	Citizen Schools of North Carolina Vance County	NGO
Vance	Vance County Schools	LEA
Wake	Community Partners Charter High School - Southern Wake Academy	School
Wake	Harriet B. Webster Task Force For Student Success, Inc.	NGO
Wake, Burke, Durham, Edgecombe, Hertford, Lee, Pender, Richmond	Futures for Kids (F4K)	NGO
Warren	The Warren Family Institute	NGO
Washington	Washington County School System	LEA
Watauga	Appalachian State University	Universities or gov't
Watauga	Watauga County Schools	LEA
Watauga	The Children's Council - Smart Start	NGO
Wayne	ADLA, Inc.	NGO
Wayne	Dillard Academy Charter School	School
Wayne, Duplin	Mount Olive College	Universities or gov't

County	Organization	Type
Wilkes	Communities In Schools of Wilkes County	NGO
Wilson	Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Wilson, Inc	NGO
Wilson	The Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club of Wilson, NC	NGO
Wilson	Wilson County Department of Social Services	NGO